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ABSTRACT

Students who are no longer children but not yet fully adolescent require an appropriate program to meet their specific education needs. The true middle school program can meet these needs. In an effort to provide usable and valuable guidelines for evaluation of existing school programs and for planning new ones, this booklet describes 14 characteristics of a "true middle school" drawn from studies and program evaluations over the past three decades. After an introduction on the history of the middle school, the booklet discusses each characteristic: (1) basic skills: repair and extension; (2) multimedia approaches to instruction; (3) creative exploration and enrichment; (4) independent study; (5) physical activities and intramural sports; (6) continuous progress; (7) flexible scheduling; (8) team teaching; (9) parent-teacher conferences and reporting pupil progress; (10) volunteers; (11) guidance and advisor/advisee programs; (12) student services; (13) attention to social development; and (14) community relations. Contains 19 references. (EV)

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Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

The Middle School Distinction

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Introduction

In the immediate post-World War II years, rapid population growth was accompanied by a similarly rapid increase in the number of junior high schools in the United States. Many of these schools were hastily conceived and organized. As a result, the programs and services offered often were modeled after the senior high school and failed to meet the needs of the younger students attending these "junior" high schools.

Growing dissatisfaction with many of the junior high schools led to the development of a new educational concept — a school program and organization designed to meet the needs and characteristics of students who were too old for elementary school programs and not yet ready for senior high school programs — a school "in the middle," or a middle school.

Junior high schools organized along high school lines also did not meet the needs of pre-adolescent or early adolescent youth because other important changes occurred that were not addressed in those early junior high school programs. For example:

- Physical maturation of children, particularly between ages 11 and 14, has accelerated, largely as a

result of improved diet and health care. Today, students in this age group are larger, stronger, and more physically mature than their counterparts of earlier generations.

- A number of social-psychological differences involving breadth and depth of knowledge are evident between students in this age group today compared to those of earlier generations. Students' knowledge base has increased because of greater travel by families, more numerous cultural and information resources provided by more extensive mass media, and greater access to reading materials. Books are available today in quantities and varieties never before present. The paperback revolution is apparent everywhere. The universal availability of television and computer technology also is a key factor in today's information environment for students.
- A larger number of students has resulted in growing depersonalization of education, and in many schools the individual student has no identity. This phenomenon is at the heart of many parents' dissatisfaction with schools in general and is particularly true of the middle grades.

Clearly, students in the middle years who were underserved by the junior high school needed something different. In part this need was for greater recognition of the basic education principle that it is important to provide differentiated, appropriate treatment of young people at varied levels of maturity. Differences inherent in the 11- to 14-year-olds when compared to younger

and older students underscore the importance of designing education programs specifically for them, rather than revamping either elementary or high school programs. Thus was born the middle school.

The Start of the Middle School

Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s with a few hundred middle schools, the middle school movement has swelled to the more than 14,000 middle schools across the nation, involving more than a quarter-million teachers and several million students.

In addition to the motivating factors described in the Introduction, a number of other reasons have propelled the middle school movement. Not all of these "reasons" may seem to be legitimate motivators; but they have, nonetheless, served that purpose.

Problems of crowding in existing buildings. Many school districts in developing residential areas face population surges that result in crowded schools and classrooms. The need for more schools and classrooms provides an opportunity to reorganize the school district to include middle schools.

Problems of declining enrollment. In "mature" communities, it is not unusual to find empty classrooms as a result of decreased enrollment. Consequent reorganization may cause older school buildings to be closed or converted

to other community uses. In the process, the student population can be rearranged with the establishment of a middle school where no such configuration previously existed.

Problems of unneeded high school buildings. Building a new high school presents a problem of what to do with the old facility. In a number of cases, nostalgia has meant that the old high school building has been converted into a middle school because of strong opposition to its demolition.

Faddism or the "bandwagon" effect. The newness of the middle school concept attracts attention. Renaming a junior high school, however, does not make it a middle school; conceptual and structural change is essential.

Problems of desegregating schools. When racially segregated residential patterns result in segregated elementary schools, the pattern can be broken by creating a new middle school attendance area, drawing together a diverse school population.

Meeting the needs of pre-adolescent or early adolescent youth. Students who are no longer "children" but not yet fully adolescent require an appropriate program to meet their specific education needs. The true middle school program can meet these needs.

The last point above is telling. What are the special needs of pre- and early adolescents? In an effort to provide usable and valuable guidelines for evaluation of existing school programs and for planning new school programs, several steps were taken by the authors in the early 1970s. First, we carefully examined the growing body of literature dealing with the middle school

concept to identify the important principles that were essential for middle school programs. Research data from a number of studies were examined and provided several important indicators of program relevance for middle school-age students. These included studies by Riegle (1971) and Hawkins (1972).

Second, we conducted interviews with education leaders who were prominent in developing and carrying on successful middle school programs, seeking their views on the important elements in a successful middle school program. Third, we observed middle school programs in operation, noting particularly those practices and program elements that appeared to be most successful for that age group of students.

As a result of these initiatives, we developed the following list of 18 characteristics most frequently found to be present in successful middle schools (Georgiady, Riegle, and Romano 1973). We believed these characteristics were essential for meeting the education needs of 11- to 14-year-old students, as well as for providing direction and guidance for their parents and for the teachers working with them.

1. Continuous progress
2. Multi-material approach
3. Flexible schedule
4. Social experiences
5. Physical experiences
6. Intramural activities
7. Team teaching
8. Planned gradualism

9. Exploratory and enrichment studies
10. Guidance services
11. Independent study
12. Basic skill repair and extension
13. Creative experiences
14. Security factor
15. Evaluation
16. Community relations
17. Student services
18. Auxiliary staffing

During the next two decades, these 18 characteristics were used in a variety of school situations, not only in studies evaluating existing middle school programs (Bohlinger 1977; Powell 1974; Swezig 1976; and Burnett 1987), but also in planning for new middle schools. In both cases we found that several of these characteristics were so closely related that it was difficult to consider them separately. For example, when planning a program of *physical experiences* (item 5) for middle school-age students, it was logical also to give attention to a program of *intramural activities* (item 6). Thus we subsequently decided to combine these two into a single characteristic category to ensure that their interrelatedness was not overlooked.

Similarly, the principle of *continuous progress* (item 1) with a nongraded organization that allows students to progress at individual rates was logically related to the principle of *planned gradualism* (item 8) for aiding students in making the transition from childhood dependence on adults to gradual independence in making

decisions for themselves. Those two characteristics could be considered as one.

Guidance services (item 10) are critical in the middle school. Every student should have the security of belonging to a group and should have the services of a teacher/counselor, as well as access to a trained guidance counselor. This is essentially the purpose of the provision of a *security factor* (item 14). Therefore, guidance services and the security factor could be combined into a single characteristic.

Finally, *exploratory and enrichment studies* (item 9) were found to be closely related to the provision for *creative experiences* (item 13). Thus these two characteristics were combined.

All of this resulted in the list of characteristics being collapsed to 14 from the original 18. These 14 characteristics, reordered and retitled from the original documents, are examined in detail in the next section.

14 Characteristics of a True Middle School

Collapsing the original 18 characteristics into the following 14 provides a basic guide to the nature of a true middle school, one that is designed specifically for students "in the middle," between the elementary school years and the full adolescence of high school.

Basic Skills: Repair and Extension

For many youth, early adolescence provides the opportunity to embark on a newly mature path of academic productivity; for others it represents a last chance to avoid an unproductive future. Therefore, it is imperative that the skills taught in the elementary school be extended through the middle school. Without basic skills — that is, reading, language arts, math, study skills, and thinking skills — students will be severely handicapped in future academic work. Toepfer (1979) reports an average growth of 38 months in mental age during each of two 2-year periods — 10 to 12 years of age and 14 to 16 years of age — but an average growth

of only seven months in mental age during the intervening period, ages 12 to 14, the very heart of the middle school years. This mental dormancy is a strong reason to give careful attention to continued skills development during these crucial years.

In reading, for example, all facets of this important skill should be integral to the total instructional program, including sight-word vocabulary, word-attack skills, silent reading, vocabulary development, and oral reading. To develop these skills, reading instruction must be a carefully designed program with an abundance of reading materials to match the various reading levels of the students. An effort also must be made to provide reading instruction as part of the teaching of all subject matter. A wide variety of reading materials (books, magazines, newspapers) should be readily available for pleasure and personal growth.

Another important part of a comprehensive reading program includes a carefully designed remediation for students who are reading below grade level. Without this support, students not only will experience failure in their daily classroom efforts but also will experience emotional and social problems. Success in reading *must* be ensured during the middle school years.

Multimedia Approaches to Instruction

In the past, too many classrooms focused on lecture approaches, used a single textbook, and in some cases used repetitive and uninspiring workbooks. To meet the widely varied needs of middle school students, schools and teachers should use a multimedia approach. Spe-

cifically, multimedia refers to the use of all types of instructional materials, both hardware and software. In conjunction with a textbook, many other materials can be used, such as videos, films, filmstrips, recordings, transparencies, television programs, computers, maps, games, field trips, and so on. These multimedia enlarge the learning environment.

The effectiveness of multimedia approaches has long been known. In a 1955 study, Romano looked at fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade groups of students in science instruction. The control groups and the experimental groups in this study both used textbooks, bulletin boards, charts, models, and field trips; but the experimental groups also used motion pictures and projected still pictures (filmstrips and slides). Both groups used a wealth of printed materials.

The fifth-grade experimental students in this study learned up to three times as much science vocabulary as did the control group; the sixth-grade group learned twice the vocabulary of the control group; and the seventh-grade group also learned twice as much as the control group. Four years later this study was replicated in social studies, and the findings were similar (Georgiady 1959).

Today, the use of "interactive multimedia" or "hypermedia" can streamline multimedia use as never before (Honore 1991). Whole libraries of documents, sounds, video, and graphic images will be possible with the use of classroom computers. However, successful implementation of multimedia approaches still calls for the

writing of units of study that include objectives, activities, materials, and so on, for specific topics.

Creative Exploration and Enrichment

The typical middle school student is one who is becoming increasingly aware of and interested in the wider world, and so the middle school curriculum should provide many opportunities for creative exploration and enrichment to nurture and build on this emerging awareness. The challenge of nurturing creativity in students lies in encouraging and supporting creativity on the part of teachers, including ensuring that many, varied resources are available.

One of the most important teaching characteristics for the middle school years is acceptance of divergent thinking. Teachers must be willing to guide students through activities that may be nontraditional or atypical, so that students can explore their widening world in new and exciting ways. One way to bring some structure to this divergence is through the development of thematic units, in which students can engage in a wide variety of activities that are suited to individual interests and skill levels. An example might be a unit on transportation in which students might: 1) make a model showing how pilots use an airplane's "stick" to turn the plane to the right or left, up or down; 2) design the runways for a local airport, taking into account local terrain and wind conditions; 3) visit a weather station to learn how weather is forecast; 4) construct models of different types of airplanes and hang them from the classroom ceiling; or 5) create a chart showing the tal-

ents and skills needed to become a pilot, stewardess, mechanic, and so on.

Enrichment and creativity go hand in hand. Enrichment activities can be built into every thematic unit to extend the basic learning. For example, in a unit on Italy, some students might learn to play and sing a few Italian songs and then teach them to their classmates. In a unit on rocks, a small group of students might make a 15-foot-long papier-mâché dinosaur to scale with complementary papier-mâché trees. In a unit on astronomy, some students might work together to write an original play about the various planets, which then might be performed by their classmates.

These are just a few of the many enrichment activities that teachers can use to stimulate students to use their creative talents. Note that music and art are included, and music and art teachers can be drawn into the instructional team for thematic units in this way. These kinds of activities also present opportunities to invite parents to school for a program that displays the young people's talents, thus such activities extend learning and communication in many ways beyond the classroom.

All middle school students have talents that can be developed when teachers provide them with an exciting learning environment that encourages students to tap into their inherent creativity.

Independent Study

When working with middle school students, educators soon learn that one of the most important needs of

the pre-adolescent is for independence. The dependence of childhood gives way, and students need opportunities to experience the challenges of independent experiences. Such experiences may include, for example, an independent project day, daily independent project time, and independent project units.

An *independent project day* provides a day for the entire class to work independently on projects defined by each student. The teacher becomes a facilitator of student activities. Each student's project becomes the focal point of that day's learning activities. Each student defines a project and proceeds to complete it. One student might want to build a miniature Indian village scene. This activity calls for studying literature and possibly viewing a film. Once the student acquires the necessary knowledge, art materials are provided. Along with building the Indian village, the student might plan a presentation for the class, maybe even for parents. This activity may be expanded to cooperative projects involving three or four students who have similar interests and want to work together to complete the project.

Daily independent project time gives a portion of the class period each day for independent study. Usually such study focuses on a particular unit. In the study of rocks, for example, the stories of prehistoric animals can be included. Three students might cooperatively plan to make a 10-foot-long papier-mâché dinosaur during the art class and to make a presentation for the class using their project. Here again, the teacher serves as a resource person to aid the students, allowing for as much independence and initiative as possible.

To use *independent project units*, the teacher must make a commitment that a particular unit will be studied on an independent basis, with the teacher serving as a resource person. Peer interaction is important, but this approach may limit such interactions.

Independent study activities ensure that middle school students both learn effectively through pursuing high-interest activities and learn how to tackle activities that help them make the transition from the dependency of childhood to the independence of adulthood.

Physical Activities and Intramural Sports

Children experience significant physical changes during the middle school years. These changes affect both their cognitive and affective well-being. One youngster may seem overwhelmed by a body that suddenly and dramatically grows and matures; another may be frustrated by a body that does not grow "enough" and stays immature "too long." Body image affects students' self-concept, social acceptance, and ability to learn.

Bodily changes in the pre-adolescent mean that schools need to attend to the following priorities: 1) a well-defined physical education curriculum that helps students understand and accept the bodily changes that are part of growing up and 2) a physical activity and intramural sports program with a variety of activities to meet the range of individual needs that middle school students exhibit.

A written curriculum should be developed with specific units of study to be taught at each grade level. Nutrition and sexuality education are important ele-

ments of the physical education curriculum for this age group. Middle school students need to understand basic information about their nutritional needs, how nutrition and diet are related to growth and body development, and the potentially negative effects of fad diets. The physical education curriculum needs to help students understand differences related to sex, such as that girls tend to grow taller earlier than do boys during the middle school years. Many girls begin to mature sexually earlier than boys do; most girls begin to menstruate during the middle school years.

A defined program of physical activities and intramural sports should be developed as part of the physical education curriculum. Many physical activity choices should be available, so that both boys and girls will have opportunities to participate in several different types of activities. Intramural sports should balance team and individual sports activities and offer both single-sex and coed opportunities. However, special effort should be made to maintain a level of activity that recognizes the physical maturity of the students. At no other point in childhood is there greater potential for physical injury than during the middle school years, where physically immature boys and girls may engage in sports and other activities for which they simply do not have sufficient muscle mass, joint stability, or coordination. Intensely competitive interscholastic sports are not advisable for the middle school years.

Continuous Progress

Traditional junior high schools and rigidly conceived middle schools too often exacerbate the problems of pre-

and early adolescents because they fail to allow for the wide difference among students in terms of intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development (Carnegie Task Force 1989). Part of such rigidity often is an inflexible age-grade organization that does not allow for continuous progress.

All students vary in their rate of learning and development, none more so than students in the middle school years. In the early 1960s Anderson and Goodlad (1963) pointed out that the rigidly enforced age-grade organization often inhibits students' learning, regardless of the students' abilities and interests. However, the nongraded school movement has not moved forward, in general because of misunderstandings about the nongraded concept. This is unfortunate, as the implementation of even a modification of the nongraded concept would better recognize the diversity among students and help all students to grow and develop naturally in all dimensions — academic, social, emotional, intellectual, and even physical. Goodlad (1990) comments further: "Mastery by all learners of a specific body of knowledge or a set of skills is not the intent of these schools. Rather, knowledge and skills are valuable as a mean by which individuals develop into fully participating members of society." A continuous progress philosophy better encourages this natural development than rigid age-grade placement.

Implementing a continuous progress school requires an examination of the curriculum to ensure a sequential development of learnings. Units of study need to be defined so that activities can be made consistent with

the diverse learning behaviors and styles of students and to ensure successful attainment of learning objectives over time. A continuous progress program has certain advantages over the traditional grade structure:

- Students can progress at their own rates of learning without being considered failures if a task is not completed within a specific time block.
- Multi-age grouping allows greater freedom for students to be successful in problem-solving.
- Students begin the new school year where they left off, rather than repeating studies or being confronted by gaps in the curriculum.
- Students are more apt to be successful not only in learning activities but also in dealing with emotional and social issues and problems because of the natural progress and lower stress inherent in continuous progress; many behavior problems are eliminated or reduced for these reasons.
- Teachers report greater awareness of the individual needs of students because continuous progress focuses on the individual, rather than on the class.
- Student learning is not artificially limited by age-bound or grade-bound curricula in a continuous progress program.

As with any new program, there are hurdles to overcome in instituting a continuous progress philosophy and program. Most teachers experienced the traditional, graded school when they were youngsters , and their training likely has reflected that orientation. The same is true for parents. Therefore, everyone will need to be

provided with instruction in the nongraded, continuous progress philosophy and how it can be implemented.

A second hurdle will be the development of study units. Teachers will need time and training to prepare such units, which also will require the adoption of multitext, multimedia approaches that may not be familiar territory for them. Likewise, traditional approaches to grading and reporting pupil progress, which we discussed previously, will need to be modified.

Continuous progress was part of many of the rural schools; but as schools increased in enrollment and were consolidated, the age-grade structure came to dominate. The middle school is an ideal place to reinstitute a continuous progress philosophy to better meet the needs of these students. A continuous progress program can better meet the student's individual learning needs during the difficult growth period of middle school.

Flexible Scheduling

Many class schedules are rigid and make accommodating special needs difficult or impossible. An effective schedule fits the education program, rather than the education program being manipulated to fit the schedule. Unfortunately, a recent study showed that 66% of the middle schools had schedules with daily periods of equal length, a circumstance that is hardly likely to augur well for flexibility (Romano and Georgiady 1994). While a true continuous progress philosophy may not be feasible, most schools can develop a flexible schedule to better accommodate diverse learning needs.

However, developing a flexible schedule is no easy task. There are many variables to consider, such as course offerings, number of students enrolled in each course, number of sections needed, space requirements, length of each section, and so on. However, with the availability of computers and a number of scheduling software programs, developing workable schedules are no longer as time-consuming as in the past.

Block scheduling is one strategy that allows for flexibility. For example, one teacher teaches math and science while another teacher teaches social studies and English. Each teacher meets only two groups of students for four class periods. Each student has only two teachers (rather than four teachers) for the four periods.

Another variation is the use of interdisciplinary team blocks in which two or more subjects are integrated using carefully defined themes of study. Variations can include three- or four-teacher teams.

Figure 1. An example of a middle school schedule combining block scheduling with team teaching.

BLOCK SCHEDULING WITH TEAM TEACHING					
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:15 9:20-10:05	Language Arts and Social Studies	Language Arts and Social Studies	Language Arts and Social Studies	Language Arts and Social Studies	Language Arts and Social Studies
10:10-10:55	Physical Education	Vocal Music	Physical Education	Vocal Music	Physical Education
11:00-11:45	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
11:50-1:25	Math and Science	Math and Science	Math and Science	Math and Science	Math and Science
1:30-2:15	Unified Arts	Speech / Health	Unified Arts	Speech / Health	Unified Arts

The schedule shown in the figure illustrates a variety of time patterns using block scheduling with team teaching. Teams of students following similar schedules can be pulled together (such as in the auditorium) for a presentation by an outside resource person or to see a film followed by a discussion. At other times, the teams might be divided into smaller units for small-group discussions, projects, simulations, or other activities.

Common planning time for all team teachers is important. By planning together, instruction may be carefully coordinated and both gaps and redundancies in curriculum can be avoided. Flexible scheduling provides more opportunities than rigid scheduling for meeting the array of learning needs that middle school students display.

Team Teaching

Special note should be made of the efficacy of team teaching during the middle school years. Of the 14 middle school characteristics we identify here, team teaching is one of the most important and, unfortunately, least often seen in practice. In *A Place Called School*, John Goodlad (1984) strongly recommended a more diversified teaching-learning environment, flexible scheduling, multi-age grouping of students, and mastery learning. The implementation of these teaching-learning strategies can be accomplished through an interdisciplinary team approach. The needs of middle school students are best met when teams of teachers work closely together to address not only academic needs but also social, emotional, and physical needs.

Because the term *team* often is attached to any group of teachers, it is necessary to better define team teaching. True team teaching is not merely "turn teaching," in which two or three teachers take turns teaching the same group of students. Rather, team teaching means that two or more teachers plan together and teach together in a variety of ways that may include, but will not be limited to, taking turns in front of the class.

A typical team teaching pattern includes two teachers teaching two or four subjects. For example, one combination includes language arts / social studies and math / science. In this arrangement, one teacher may take the lead to plan the language arts and social studies areas while the other teacher plans the math and science areas. Discussions are held to coordinate instruction and tackle logistical problems, and then *both* team members teach *all* four subjects.

As teachers become secure with team teaching, they may integrate additional content areas. As team teaching proceeds, students begin to understand how one instructional area affects another and how different kinds of learning work together. A good example is reading. That skill can be drawn across all subjects. But so can math and science, as students discover aspects of those subjects in literature, history, art, music, and so on. Writing is another skill that can cut across all subjects.

Problems that arise from team teaching, such as difficult logistics, generally can be solved if 1) adequate material resources are available, 2) teachers have ample common planning time, and 3) support services are available, such as a remedial reading teacher and a

school psychologist. Following are some important benefits of team teaching:

- Better units of study result from teachers sharing their ideas with one another and planning together.
- Teaming brings about a closeness of teachers and students; one might label this approach, "building a school family."
- Teachers get to know their students better and thus can provide more individualized instruction.
- Parent-teacher conferences can be greatly improved through the teacher-advisor observing a particular student in the different teaching-learning situations that are permitted by team teaching.
- Team teaching can create an exciting teaching-learning environment for both teachers and students, which will more likely result in students working to capacity.

Parent-Teacher Conferences and Reporting Pupil Progress

The traditional letter grading system has long been criticized as saying little about student progress. In 1966, for example, Ernest Melby wrote, "Our marking system is no longer relevant to the needs and educational programs of our society. It says nothing meaningful about a pupil . . . it says nothing about the most important outcomes of education." However, a 1978 study pointed out that the A-B-C-D-F system was then — and still is, we contend — the first choice of middle school teachers and administrators for reporting student progress.

even though that system provides limited information (Crane 1978).

If one accepts that each middle school student is unique, then educators should seriously consider individualizing both instruction and evaluation. Furthermore, educators need to develop an evaluation method that takes into account each student's emotional, physical, and social development. This philosophy was well-expressed in a publication that the Lake Bluff School of Shorewood, Wisconsin, sent to parents, which stated:

> It is the aim of the educational program to be so interesting and stimulating that the individuals will continue the quest for knowledge throughout their lives. Such responsibility can only be met through active cooperation on the part of parents, administrators, teachers, and the community.

Assuming an effective teacher-advisor system, perhaps the most effective way to ensure that parents gain accurate knowledge about the academic, social, emotional, and physical progress of their children is through parent-teacher conferences. Well-structured conferences provide for two-way exchanges of information between the parent and the teacher-advisor, and in some cases between the parent and the student's individual teachers. More will be said about teacher-advisors in the section on Guidance and Advisor-Advisee Programs.

During conferences, parents will want to know about the curriculum for the year and hear an explanation of the grading system and important school policies. They will want to know how they can help their youngster succeed, how to reinforce the homework policy, and if

their student is socially accepted by his or her peers. At the same time, teachers should have an opportunity to learn from parents about their child's life at home, about the student's feelings concerning the school and other students in the school, and certainly about the student's interests in terms of academics and other areas related to the child's social, emotional, and physical health and well-being.

"Grades" per se are the most common manner of reporting pupil progress, but they should at least be supplemented by (if not replaced by) effective, periodic parent-teacher conferences.

Volunteers

Any organization that serves the public can use the services of dedicated, unpaid volunteers in addition to its regular employees. Even school districts with ample funds use volunteers in many of their activities, not only because volunteers contribute to the educational effort but also because volunteer involvement is an effective means of community and parent involvement.

Many school volunteers are parents of the students in the school, but in recent years volunteer ranks have swelled by the inclusion of senior citizens interested in remaining active and "giving back" to the community through work with young people.

The first step in developing a successful volunteer program is to answer three questions:

- What learning or other needs are the professional staff having difficulty meeting?

- How might volunteers assist the professional staff to meet these unmet needs?
- What steps should be taken to recruit volunteers with suitable skills and interests?

Specific tasks that volunteers might undertake with proper teacher supervision include:

- Working with student groups on learning activities or planning group projects.
- Tutoring students with special needs.
- Reading to students individually or in small groups.
- Setting up audiovisual equipment.
- Supervising students during recess time.
- Assisting in grading student work and discussing results.
- Helping prepare bulletin boards.
- Preparing instructional materials with the supervision of the teacher.

Many schools that involve parent and community volunteers find that the volunteers are excellent public relations people. They have the "inside" information of what is going on in the schools and become believable advocates of the school and its program. (For additional information, see fastbacks 333 *How to Start a Student Mentor Program*, by Susan G. Weinberger, and 402 *Intergenerational Education Programs*, by Dawn E. MacBain.)

Another important volunteer source is the students themselves, who can help in peer tutoring and cross-age tutoring. (For more information about student tutoring, see fastback 415 *Peer Tutoring for K-12 Success*, by Elizabeth S. Foster-Harrison.)

Finally, those who work with volunteers should take time periodically to evaluate the success of the volunteer program. Is the work of the volunteers meeting the needs that the program intended to meet? Are interactions between volunteers and parents, volunteers and teachers, and volunteers and students positive and productive? How do the volunteers see their work? Answering these questions can help to ensure that the volunteer program accomplishes its goals.

Guidance and Advisor/Advisee Programs

For most students, the middle school years are a period of enormous personal changes — emotional, social, physical, and intellectual. Educators need to realize that these changes often result in behaviors that otherwise might lead one to conclude, as William Wattenberg (1965) wrote, that "these children have all of the characteristics of a seriously mentally ill person and spontaneously recover." But, in fact, that is what middle school is about — and why an effective guidance program is essential.

If a comprehensive guidance program is to succeed, it will require an instructional leader, an effective school principal who is genuinely concerned about the implementation of a guidance program and is willing to provide the needed resources and coordination. The guidance program must have committed and qualified personnel, funds for staff to participate in professional improvement activities, and basic equipment and materials.

Because classroom teachers are involved with middle school students on a daily basis, they are the first

level of guidance through an advisor/advisee program. Thus teachers not only teach subject matter but are available to guide students through the solving of any emerging social, physical, or academic problems or concerns. In the *Turning Points* (1989) report, the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents strongly recommended that an advisor/advisee program be made up of small groups of students with a single teacher in order to ensure that every student in the school is well known by at least one adult.

Making up small advisory groups will mean that all professional staff — including the specialists in physical education, music, and art; the librarian; and other nonclassroom teachers — will be responsible for meeting with a group of students on a regular basis.

The school guidance counselor will play an important role in developing the advisor/advisee program and in maintaining all of the school's counseling and guidance services. Part of this role will include developing and coordinating staff inservice training. Some teachers may not have the skills needed to function as good frontline advisors, and so it is imperative that a well-planned inservice program be provided. This program should be cooperatively planned by the teachers and a school guidance counselor.

Additionally, of course, the counselor will be directly responsible for working with troubled youngsters and their parents and should be available to assist the advisors with more severe guidance cases.

Teacher-advisors must exercise a number of skills, including: 1) observing and, when necessary, recording

student behaviors; 2) administering some standardized tests; and 3) providing information and counsel to students (and parents) about vocational, educational, personal, and social matters. The most successful teacher-advisors also encourage communication and collaboration between home and school.

Principals, counselors, and teachers can design a successful advisor-advisee program by developing written guides and planning a sequence of activities, so that the program is systematic, rather than hit-or-miss. For example, the small groups might take up a sequence of discussion topics, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Building Positive Self-Awareness
- Understanding Normal Growth Characteristics
- Coping with Student-Parent, Student-Teacher, and Student-Student Conflict
- Accepting Constructive Criticism

A well-planned guidance program, including a carefully planned and articulated advisor/advisee program, is an essential component of the fully functional middle school. If students are to experience success in their lives, then it behooves administrators, guidance personnel, classroom teachers, and parents to work together harmoniously. Guidance activities can make a significant difference in the students' lives. (For more information about teacher-advisors, see fastback 393 *Developing an Effective Advisor/Advisee Program*, by Phyllis E. Dale.)

Student Services

The challenging changes that students of middle school age experience can be best addressed by a range of services. Some of these, such as guidance and advisor/advisee programs, already have been discussed. Volunteers also can provide services that students and teachers need. But a number of additional student services are extremely useful.

Such services may be related to learning challenges or physical, emotional, or social needs. Service providers include:

- school psychologists
- school social workers
- reading specialists
- bilingual and English-as-a-second-language specialists
- special educators in various fields, such as learning disabilities
- home instruction teachers

Social service providers with liaison relationships to the school may include groups such as 4H, Teenagers with Alcoholic Parents, police-sponsored youth programs, and so on.

Numerous state, regional, county, and municipal service agencies offer an array of services. Along with the state department of education and the federal Education Department, these resources can be invaluable to all schools but especially to middle schools that are trying to address competently and comprehensively the many needs of pre- and early adolescents.

Attention to Social Development

Although middle school students exhibit needs related to intellectual, physical, and emotional growth and change, perhaps the area in which the most dramatic changes occur is the social. Middle school students are neither children nor adults, nor in fact are they truly teenagers yet. They are very much "in the middle." And that position carries its own challenges.

Middle school often is the time when the childhood norm of same-sex social activities gives way to mixed-sex activities and the need for each young person to find acceptance in an increasingly important peer group. The focus of pre- and early adolescents changes from parents and teachers to peers, and so the pressure to find acceptance in the peer group can seem to be almost unbearable.

Educators can help students find appropriate peer groups and individual roles. They can help steer students away from unhealthy peer-group influences, such as experimenting with drugs, smoking, or sexual activity, by developing healthy social outlets. Among these outlets are "mixers," such as school dances or picnics; class projects that foster positive peer relations; and interest-centered clubs that help students find peers with similar interests. Examples of topical outlets include career education, creative writing, debate, gymnastics, music, money management, personal grooming and fashion, speech, woodworking, and so on. Extracurricular activities and clubs include those involved in astronomy, band, books, camping, chess, coin or stamp collecting, computers, drama, drawing, a for-

eign language, jewelry making, magic, model building, singing or instrumental music, journalism, pen pals, puppetry, rock hounding, scouts, student council, and, of course, sports.

While middle school students benefit from positive peer-group activities and from opportunities to learn from and be counseled by adults (such as in the advisor/advisee program), they also need time to learn how to be independent. In this regard, independent projects and school-related individual activities (such as a community service project) can be valuable.

A wide variety of social activities will address the diversity of both interests and social development of middle school students.

Community Relations

The typical middle-schooler's response to the question, "What's happening at school?" is, "Nothing." Letting students tell the school story is not enough; every school needs to take up community relations as an essential activity. Only by reaching out to the community can a school gain the support that is needed to make the school programs optimally effective for all students.

Earlier we discussed the importance of working with community support services, but support can be drawn from the larger community, too. Both parents and non-parent taxpayers need to view the middle school as a successful, important enterprise. A bumper sticker that proudly says, "My son/daughter is an honor student at X Middle School," is a start — but just a start.

Schools can approach community relations and communication in many ways. For example, one school district worked with three parents who served as school news reporters. These volunteers were responsible for covering the "school beat" — gathering facts, writing news stories, taking photographs, and then submitting the news to the local news media. When these parents started working in this way, it was the first time their community had seen articles relating to instruction at all levels and not just high school sports.

Another example is a school community newsletter. Many schools find it to be a valid — and valuable — use of modest school funds to provide a periodic four- to eight-page newsletter that is sent not only to parents but to all taxpayers in the school community.

Yet another vehicle for community relations is the parent-teacher organization. While PTAs often are found at the elementary level, many middle schools have difficulty sustaining such efforts. Often the key to revitalizing the parent-teacher organization is actively involving as many parents and teachers as possible. One activity that this type of group can undertake, of course, is communication. The group can be the organizers of parent-teacher conferences and community learning and information programs for parents and nonparents alike. The parent-teacher group can be the oversight committee for the volunteer program, and many in the group can actually be volunteers throughout the school.

Parent-teacher groups also can sponsor and organize special events, such as school plays, music programs, sports events, and field trips; they can develop the par-

ent handbook and parent orientation programs; and they can provide parent and community support to new teachers and administrators and to new families that move into the community.

All of these efforts "sell" the school — that is, they give the community, parents and nonparents alike, opportunities to see not only what the school does but why it is a valuable community asset.

Conclusion

The middle school movement in the United States has experienced rapid growth in numbers of schools, educators, and types of related programs. While educators can take pride in this growth, they also must view it with caution. Rapid growth may be good, but it also must be consistent with the best interests of middle school students, their parents, and their teachers. The urgency of caution in this regard is dramatically stated in the report of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents (1989):

> A volatile mismatch exists between the organization and curriculum of middle grade schools and the intellectual and emotional needs of young adolescents. Caught in a vortex of changing demands, the engagement of many youth in learning diminishes and their rates of alienation, substance abuse, absenteeism, and dropping out of school begin to rise.

This statement underscores the critical importance of ensuring that schools established for the education of pre- and early adolescent youth, or schools being considered for them, use every means possible to guarantee that they will serve the purposes for which they are intended.

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